



Social Security E-Town Hall “How-To”

Despite all that is at stake for them in the Social Security debate, younger Americans have been more difficult to engage on this issue than older Americans. However, it is imperative that Democrats reach out to them and explain the tremendous costs of Republican privatization proposals and how those costs would largely fall on their shoulders.

Traditional town halls and direct mail may not be the most effective tools for communicating this message to younger Americans. E-mail and the internet provide alternative means of communication with the tech-savvy younger generation.

The attached Social Security e-Town Hall “How-To” guide provides you with information on how to easily use the internet to reach out to young people in your district on this issue, as well as on other issues in the future, by hosting an e-Town Hall.

GENERAL HOW-TO

The House Democratic Caucus has online services to assist you in hosting an e-town hall. Contact Allie Neill at the Caucus at 226-3210 for assistance.

Both Congressman Levin and Congressman Blumenauer have held successful Social Security e-town halls, the transcripts of which are available at <http://demcaucus.townhall.house.gov>. Both offices found their e-town halls simple to organize and well-received among constituents. More information on their experiences is below.

Step One

Contact the Democratic Caucus to set up a time and day for your e-town hall and to receive the URL (or website address) for the town hall.

Step Two

Work with the Democratic Caucus to set up the basic content for your town hall webpage, including a brief introduction informing constituents that it will be the future site of the town hall, the date and time, and a link to submit questions in advance.

Step Three

Advertise your town hall as early as possible, preferably at least two weeks in advance. Promote it on your website, weekly or monthly newsletters, at all events in the district, in your District and Congressional offices, in local newspapers, with a media advisory, and through local youth and Democratic clubs and organizations. Be sure to include the URL or website address in all notifications so constituents can submit questions early.

Step Four

E-mail approximately two weeks in advance any constituents for whom you have e-mail addresses (i.e. from e-newsletter efforts) to invite them to participate in the event and again just before the event. If you are sending a Social Security e-newsletter targeted to younger voters as suggested by the House Democratic Leadership, you may use the e-mails gained through that process to target younger constituents.

Step Five

Begin to collect questions from constituents in advance. Prepare an introduction, conclusion and answers to expected questions/questions submitted prior to the e-town hall. [Note: Once the e-town hall begins, it can take a few moments to write responses. To avoid too much down time for participants, alternate between questions you received beforehand for which you have prepared responses and those received during the day of your event.]

Step Five

In addition to preparing for questions as you would for any town hall, your staff will need to ensure that they are familiar with the Democratic Caucus's online program for conducting e-town halls and participate in a quick training session.

Step Six – Day of the E-Town Hall

You will need staffers present to monitor the town hall and you may also wish to have your Social Security legislative assistant present to help draft responses quickly. Caucus Staff will help you administer the town hall.

EXAMPLES OF SUCESSFUL E-TOWN HALLS

Congressman Levin's E-Town Hall

Congressman Levin held his first online town hall at noon on Tuesday, April 12th. The forum extended past the planned hour to an hour and a half, and the technology was very easy to utilize. Congressman Levin announced the town hall to his constituents through e-mail notifications, media advisories, as well as his weekly e-newsletter. Congressman Levin received over 180 questions before the online chat began and 60 during the forum, with a large percentage of those indicating they were from younger constituents. The forum was so successful that Rep. Levin is looking to host another online forum in the near future to reach out to constituents who may have a hard time making it to his town hall meetings

in Michigan. To view a transcript of Congressman Levin's online town hall:
<http://demcaucus.townhall.house.gov>.

Congressman Blumenauer's E-Town Hall

Congressman Blumenauer hosted a very successful Social Security e-town hall with constituents from 4:00 pm-5:00 pm on March 8th. Congressman Blumenauer's website received nearly 1,000 web hits during the town hall, with over 60 questions submitted during the forum and over 50 submitted prior. Many of Congressman Blumenauer constituents voiced their appreciation for having a way to connect over the internet because they were unable to meet with him during his community meetings during the month of February. To view a transcript of Congressman Levin's online town hall:
<http://demcaucus.townhall.house.gov>.

ROCK THE VOTE

Rock the Vote, a non-partisan organization that works to involve young people in the political process and that is opposed to Social Security privatization, is willing to help promote and participate in your e-town hall if you would like to include a younger voice. Contact the Office of the Democratic Whip at 225-3130 or Hans Reimer with Rock the Vote at 213-1072 for more information on how to include Rock the Vote in your e-town hall.